Fam. Africa

Harvard Theological Review, April, 1924

8

ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN AFRICA

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EVIDENCE for the existence of ancestor worship among the uncivilized peoples of Africa is varied and abundant.[1] Outside the limited range of Mohammedan and Christian influence, there are few tribes whose religion has been reported with any care that do not appear to practice ancestor worship in some form. Without any attempt to provide a complete volume of testimony, and with the purpose only to indicate the wide range and diversity of these practices, we shall review geographically a portion of the facts available, passing across the map somewhat irregularly from northwest to southeast.

Among the natives of French Guinea the numerous spirits worshipped include the spirits of ancestors, who are regarded as the protectors of the family. Chief among them is the eponymous first ancestor, who has the power of making rain and whose image is concealed in every hut. Some of the ancestral spirits are regarded as good, some as evil. The latter are especially dreaded, and sacrifices are readily offered to them to persuade them to keep away. The prevailing belief is that the spirits of the deceased need the nourishment given them by the living, although in certain places the natives refuse them any sort of tribute.[2]

Similar rites and beliefs are found among the Vei of Liberia. The spirits of the dead have the power to do evil to the individual and the tribe, especially if provision is not made for their need of food and clothes. The first duty, therefore, of the members of the tribe is to protect themselves against these spirits

[1] The authorities quoted for the facts which follow include government officials, missionaries, anthropologists, and travellers. Though their testimony is of unequal value, most of them are first-hand observers, and the majority of their works are of fairly recent date. The spelling of tribal names will not satisfy everyone; but there is no method of spelling these names which does satisfy everyone.

[2] André Arcin, La Guinée Française, Paris, 1907, pp. 395 f.

by satisfying their wants. In all the Vei towns there are annual or semi-annual sacrifices to the recently deceased, during which the graves are visited, with offerings of rice and rum and songs chanted in honor of the dead.[3]

The natives of Segu, along the upper Niger, "believe in the existence of the shades of the dead; they venerate them and seek by certain practices to conciliate them." [4] The Bambara generally sacrifice to the dead on the threshold of the house, pouring the blood on the two side-walls of the entrance — an indication that the souls of the dead dwell especially in the threshold.[5] Some two or three hundred miles to the east, in the territory of the Yatenga and of the Mossi tribes, the ancestors rank first among the spirits worshipped. The chief feast of the year is sacred to them, and at all other religious festivities, as well, they receive sacrifices. Apart from the regular feasts, offerings are likewise made to ancestors, particularly when they appear in dreams as an indication of their wants, or when someone is sick and their aid is sought to secure recovery.[6] Indeed, "the foundation of their religion seems to consist in a continual preoccupation with the subject of an ever possible intervention of deceased ancestors in the existence of the living." [7]

In the Bontuku region, northeast of the Ivory Coast, the Abrons sacrifice to ancestors at two annual feasts.[8] Similar sacrifices are more frequent among the Koulangos, where special offerings to ancestors are made at times of birth and marriage, to secure good crops, etc.[9]

In Ashanti and Dahomey, two of the chief states of Guinea, the ghosts of the dead are regarded as tutelary spirits.[10] It is by the royal families of these petty kingdoms that ancestor worship has been specially developed. At the Dahomey court there have been annual sacrifices by the kings upon the graves

[3] G. W. Ellis, Negro Culture in West Africa, New York, 1914, pp. 86 f.
[4] G. Jaime, De Koulikoro à Tombouctou, Paris, 1894, p. 328.
[5] J. G. Frazer, Folk-lore in the Old Testament, vol. III, London, 1918, p. 17.
[6] L. Tauxier, Le Noir du Yatenga, Paris, 1917, p. 373.
[7] Lucien Marc, Le Pays Mossi, Paris, 1909, pp. 155 f.
[8] L. Tauxier, Le Noir de Bondoukou, Paris, 1921, p. 355.
[9] Ibid., pp. 172 f.
[10] C. H. Toy, Introduction to the History of Religions, Boston, 1913, p. 154.

of former kings, who are thereby induced to lend their aid in time of war. Such sacrifices have involved the slaughter not only of sheep and fowls but also of men.[11] The scenes witnessed at these anniversary feasts of the dead "rivalled in horror those held in honor of the Aztec gods." [12] A further and less gory practice of the Dahomey royal family is to appoint some female official to represent each deceased monarch on ceremonial occasions, a custom which we may note as an interesting parallel to the "personator" of ancient China. The devotion to ancestors in Dahomey, however, is not limited to the kings alone, for members of the upper classes are accustomed to place in their houses the skulls of those who have been dead for more than a few years and to appeal to them for advice and assistance.[13]

The Yoruba, who live just to the east of Dahomey, maintain in their houses a family worship of deceased ancestors, both male and female.[14] Their belief in the power of the dead over the living is enhanced by the frequent custom of burying the dead in the houses, and expresses itself both in prayers for protection and in consultation of the dead upon affairs of importance.[15]

The tribes of the Gold Coast and Slave Coast look to the dead as protectors of the family who are interested in the affairs of this world and in the fortunes of their descendants; and appeals for aid, accompanied by offerings, are sometimes made to the spirits of such ancestors as are not too remote.[16] Nevertheless, as Ellis points out in his noted work on the Ewe-speaking peoples, the dead, though commonly regarded as guardians, are not considered to be gods. They are in a category

[11] A. B. Ellis, The Ewe-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast, London, 1890, pp. 111 f.

[12] A. H. Keane, Man, Past and Present, Cambridge, 1899, p. 58.

[13] A. B. Ellis, op. cit., pp. 110 f.

[14] A. B. Ellis, The Yoruba-speaking Peoples, London, 1894, p. 137; R. E. Dennett, At the Back of the Black Man's Mind, London, 1906, pp. 245 f., quoting James Johnson's Yoruba Heathenism.

[15] R. Campbell, A Pilgrimage to my Motherland, London, 1861, pp. 63 f.; see also Toy, op. cit., p. 154.

[16] Ellis, Yoruba-speaking Peoples, pp. 24 f., 109; B. Cruickshank, Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa. London, 1853, vol. II, p. 135.

entirely different from that of gods or nature-spirits, who must constantly be propitiated to avert their ill-will, and who are objects of worship not only for the living but for the dead themselves. Furthermore the nature gods are not deified dead men, and ancestral ghosts seldom if ever develop into nature-spirits.[17]

Of the inhabitants of the plateau of Bandiagara in south-central Nigeria it is recorded that an altar to ancestors is placed in the family home, upon which sacrifices are offered during a certain period after death when the soul hovers between the grave and the home.[18]

Somewhat fuller evidence is available for the general area of both the Edo-speaking peoples and the Ibo-speaking peoples of Nigeria. Among the former every house has its shrine and its household worship, which includes the worship of ancestors. The ancestors are represented sometimes by long wooden staves carved with decorations, sometimes by heads of wood or bronze. Annual celebrations take place, usually on the anniversary of the death. The sacrifices, offered by all the sons or by the eldest son, "seem to be looked upon rather as a means of keeping away sickness or other misfortune than as a duty imposed by pious regard." [19] Among the Ibo-speaking peoples similar practices are found. Here too the ancestors are represented by long staves. Since their spirits are present at feasts, a handful of food is usually thrown to them. Regular sacrifices occur in the seventh or eighth month, and special sacrifices on such occasions as a birth in the family.[20]

The principal features of the religion of the Ekoi of southern Nigeria are reported to be the cult of nature spirits and of ancestors. One of their head priests is quoted as saying, "I do not know if ghosts can do harm to the living, but I always sacrifice yams and plantains to my father's spirit, so that I may

[17] Ellis, Yoruba-speaking Peoples, pp. 24 f., 102–105.

[18] Louis Desplagnes, Le Plateau Central Nigérien, Paris, 1907, pp. 261 f.

[19] N. W. Thomas, Anthropological Report on the Edo-speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Pt. I, London, 1910, pp. 24, 37 f., 78.

[20] N. W. Thomas, Anthropological Report on the Ibo-speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Pt. I, London, 1913, pp. 34 f.

not fall sick, and to ask him to protect my farms. About once a year, too . . . I sacrifice to my mother, for we know that ghosts are hungry just as we are." [21]

In the adjacent territory of Cameroon the worship of the dead is prevalent,[22] and among certain tribes (such as the Tikar) constitutes the most important and influential factor in religion. The Tikar, in contrast with many other tribes, believe that the ghosts of evil men can work no harm to the living. The ghosts of the good, however, can do good to their surviving relatives and friends, but have no power to punish. These good ghosts, preferably the spirits of deceased fathers, are frequently called upon for protection.[23]

At least two tribes in Gabun — the Fang [24] and the Mpongwe — are described as ancestor-worshippers. The Mpongwe regard the dead as possessing increased powers; they present to them offerings of food and drink, and call upon them in time of trouble.[25]

The Bavili of Loango, near the coast further south, believe that the ghosts of important persons remain active and powerful. They continue to share in the tribal life, and manifest their activity by helping or punishing through control over the wind, the crops, etc.[26]

In the northwest part of the Belgian Congo the Bangala [27] are accustomed to build huts above the tombs of deceased fathers and there to make offerings of fruit and vegetables. The *mongoli*, or ancestral spirits, watch over the family. They inhabit the forests and rivers, and visit the villages in animal form

[21] P. A. Talbot, In the Shadow of the Bush, London, 1912, pp. 13, 232 f. For notes on ancestor worship along the Lower Niger, see also A. G. Leonard, The Lower Niger and its Tribes, London, 1906, pp. 67, 89, 434.

[22] E. Zintgraff, Nord-Kamerun, Berlin, 1895, p. 221; A. Seidel, Deutsch-Kamerun, Berlin, 1906, pp. 205 f.

[23] F. and M. P. Thorbecke, Im Hochland von Mittel-Kamerun, Pt. III, Hamburg, 1919, pp. 83 f.

[24] A. L. Cureau, Savage Man in Central Africa (translated), London, 1915, pp. 282 f.

[25] J. L. Wilson, Western Africa, New York, 1856, pp. 388, 392 ff.; P. Barret, L'Afrique Occidentale, vol. II, Paris, 1888, pp. 193 f.

[26] A. Le Roy, The Religion of the Primitives (translated), New York, 1922, p. 105.

[27] C. Van Overbergh, Les Bangala, Brussels, 1907, p. 253.

to receive wine and food. Prayers and sacrifice are offered at irregular intervals by the favorite son to gain the good-will of father or grandfather. There is no tendance of ancestors, however, beyond the fourth generation.[28]

Similar practices are related of other Congo peoples, the Mayumbe [29] and the Waregga.[30] Of the Congo natives in general Claridge writes, "The Congolese pray to the dead, praise the dead, and sacrifice to the dead. . . . The premise is that the dead can help the living, that they can hear prayer, that they have the means and the disposition to grant their petitions." [31]

Uganda, Kenya (former "British East Africa"), and Tanganyika Territory (former "German East Africa") offer especially abundant evidence of ancestor worship.

The religion of the Bahima of Ankole consists chiefly in maintaining helpful relations with the spirits of departed relatives by means of continual offerings.[32] Each home has its shrine for a family ghost.[33] For the Banyankole the really important supernatural beings are the ghosts. All classes have shrines for their family ghosts; and it is to these spirits rather than to the great gods that the people turn for help, with offerings and prayers.[34] The Banyoro have the custom of presenting a new-born child to the ancestral spirits with prayers requesting long life and riches.[35] When the king of the tribe falls sick, he attributes it to the influence of an ancestral ghost and sends an offering to the grave;[36] and the people as a whole stand in constant awe of the spirits of the departed, particularly of those who were powerful in life.[37] The Lango, a Nilotic tribe of Uganda, maintain shrines where offerings are presented

[28] E. S. Hartland, Ritual and Belief, London, 1914, p. 148; J. H. Weeks, Among Congo Cannibals, London, 1913, pp. 261, 268.

[29] C. Van Overbergh, Les Mayombe, Brussels, 1907, p. 289.

[30] Delhaise, Les Warega, Brussels, 1909, p. 207.

[31] G. C. Claridge, Wild Bush Tribes of Tropical Africa, London, 1922, pp. 279, 284.

[32] J. G. Frazer, Golden Bough, 3d ed., Pt. IV, vol. II, London, 1911–15, pp. 190 f.

[33] J. Roscoe, The Northern Bantu, Cambridge, 1915, p. 132.

[34] J. Roscoe, The Banyankole, Cambridge, 1923, p. 25.

[35] H. Johnston, The Uganda Protectorate, vol. II, London, 1902, p. 587.

[36] J. Roscoe, The Northern Bantu, p. 94.

[37] J. Roscoe, The Bakitara or Banyoro, Cambridge, 1923, p. 41.

to ancestral spirits.[38] The ghosts of the dead are believed by the Basoga to help or hinder in sickness and in prosperity, and to have power over birth and death. They receive in consequence more fear and more attention than the gods. "The belief in ghosts and the propitiation of them are the chief features of their most constant and regular acts of worship." [39] The worship of the Bateso is almost entirely confined to ghosts of the dead.[40] The Wawanga [41] and the Bagesu in the neighborhood of Mount Elgon frequently place near the doorways of their houses large stones where the spirits of male ancestors may rest. The Bagesu regard these ghosts as the particular guardians of children, and food and drink are regularly set before them with such words as "Be kind to the children. Do them no harm." [42] The Kavirondo, whose chief form of religion is the worship of the dead,[43] have the same practice of setting up stones, upon which libations of goat's blood are poured. They sometimes cut a small door at the back of the dwelling to assist the passage in and out of good ancestral spirits. But the only spirits who receive attention are those of men who were important in their lifetime.[44]

In the large tribe of the Baganda the most venerated spirits were probably those of departed relatives, whose power for good or evil was incalculable. The ghosts were thought to have many of the wants and emotions of the living. Subject to cold and thirst (although not, curiously enough, to hunger), they could be pleased by kindness or angered by neglect. Hence it was the constant concern of the living to care for their interests and thus to avoid the retaliation that might bring sickness and death in the clan. The majority of the ghosts, however, if treated well, were kindly disposed to assist the members of their own clan; and frequent offerings of beer or clothing at

[38] J. H. Driberg, The Lango, London, 1923, p. 231.

[39] Roscoe, Northern Bantu, p. 245.

[40] Ibid., p. 273.

[41] Frazer, Folk-lore in the Old Testament, vol. III, p. 263.

[42] Roscoe, Northern Bantu, p. 180.

[43] Ibid., p. 291; K. H. Dundas in Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute, vol. XLIII, p. 45.

[44] Johnston, Uganda Protectorate, vol. II, p. 752.

the small shrines near the graves were commonly thought to result in increase of wealth and fertility for the family.[45]

The Suk of Kenya are one of the numerous African peoples who believe that a man's spirit passes at death into a snake. The presence of a snake in the house indicates that some ancestor is hungry, and caution suggests that milk and meat should be promptly offered to it.[46] A similiar belief is found among the Akikuyu, who ascribe all the ordinary ills of life to the action of the spirits of the departed.[47] Other tribes who look upon serpents as incarnating ancestral spirits include the Zulus, Thonga, Angoni, Wabondei, Masai, Nandi, and Dinkas.[48] The Wakamba of Kenya believe themselves surrounded by innumerable ancestral spirits (*aiimu*) who manifest themselves in many ways and are often regarded as inhabiting wild fig-trees. Huts are built at the foot of these trees, and periodical sacrifices offered there. The first-fruits are always presented to the *aiimu* before any crop can be eaten. There prevails also an unusual belief that every married woman is not only the wife of a living man but also of some departed ancestor. Her fertility depends on the latter as well as on the former.[49] The belief in ancestral spirits is the predominating spiritual factor in the minds of the great majority of the people. The reality and closeness of this influence upon the daily life of the native can hardly be exaggerated.[50] The religious ideas of the Wagiriama, a tribe near Mombasa, are mainly connected with ancestor worship. "Individuals worship the shades of their immediate ancestors or elder relatives; and the *k'omas* (souls?) of the whole nation are worshipped on public occasions. . . . Sacrifices are often made at the graves with a little flour and water poured into a coconut shell let into the ground, the fowls and other

[45] J. Roscoe, The Baganda, London, 1911, pp. 273–288.

[46] M. W. H. Beech, The Suk, Oxford, 1911, p. 20.

[47] W. S. and K. Routledge, With a Prehistoric People, London, 1910, p. 227; Frazer, Golden Bough, Pt. IV, vol. I, pp. 82 f.

[48] Ibid.

[49] C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of A-Kamba, Cambridge, 1910, pp. 85 f.; Frazer, Golden Bough, Pt. V, vol. II, p. 113; Pt. I, vol. II, p. 317.

[50] C. W. Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, London, 1922, pp. 22, 27 ff.; Hobley, Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute, vol. XLI, p. 432.

victims being so killed that the blood shall trickle into the grave. At the offering the dead are called by name to come and partake and bring their friends with them." [51] Prayers and sacrifices are offered in time of disease, of marriage, birth, and death, and at seedtime and harvest.[52]

The same sort of testimony is forthcoming from investigators in Tanganyika Territory (former "German East Africa"). On its northeast borders, near Lake Kivu, the Bañarwanda look upon the souls even of the best of the departed as not always kind. If they are not to cause calamities they must be continually propitiated with offerings.[53] Certain tribes north of Lake Tanganyika, in Ruanda, built little grass huts for their ancestors, where the head of the family makes offerings of meat and beer.[54] One member of a neighboring tribe is reported as saying: "If we want to go on a journey, or need rain or any other thing, we bring food here [to the spirit-hut] to show our ancestors we really want assistance; and they help us." [55] Another native, belonging to the Wachaga near Mount Kilimanjaro, slaughtered a wether at a certain spot and splashed its blood about. "My grandfather lived up here," he explained, "and since I now visit his old dwelling-place so often, I must just once bring his spirit something to eat. Otherwise he would be angry with me." [56] His tribe were accustomed to offer these sacrifices of blood in order to obtain children, at the time of circumcision, and eight days after a death. At these times prayers were addressed to the ancestral spirits with invitations to eat.[57] There is evidence also that ancestor worship plays an equally important part in the religion of many other tribes of this region, such as the Masai,[58] the Wambugwe,[59] the San-

[51] A. H. Keane, op. cit., pp. 95 f.

[52] Le Roy, op. cit., p. 203.

[53] Hartland, op. cit., p. 264.

[54] J. Czekanowski, in Wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse der Deutschen Zentral-Afrika-Expedition 1907–1908, vol. VI, Leipzig, 1917, p. 298; H. Meyer, Die Barundi, Leipzig, 1916, pp. 135 f.

[55] A. J. Swann, Fighting the Slave-Hunters in Central Africa, London, 1910, p. 208.

[56] G. Volkens, Der Kilimandscharo, Berlin, 1897, p. 254.

[57] Frazer, Folk-lore in the Old Testament, vol. II, pp. 16 f.; cf. P. E. Meyer, in Anthropos, vol. XII–XIII, pp. 190 f.

[58] S. L. Hinde, The Last of the Masai, London, 1901; pp. 101 f.

[59] O. Baumann, Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle, Berlin, 1894, pp. 187, 193.

dawi,[59a] and the Wabondei.[60] The Sandawi offer beer, cattle, and sheep to the souls of their ancestors, with prayers for rain.[61] Practically all the worship of the Wahehe is concerned with the spirits of the dead, who can control the weather, send disease, and otherwise wield a powerful influence on the course of events. Prayers and sacrifices are offered to them on their graves in time of war or sickness or on the eve of a journey.[62] The natives in the region of Newala, on the southern border of Tanganyika Territory, believe that deceased ancestors inhabit certain trees, before which they place food and drink and to which they address their petitions. A typical prayer is to this effect: "I have . . . brought you meal and beer. You, my ancestor, know that we are going to war against our enemies. . . . We are to march tomorrow; let no bullet strike me, no arrow and no spear." [63] To multiply the number of these obscure tribal names would make no clearer the wide extent of ancestor worship in this area; and we may conclude our survey of this particular territory by noting that offerings and prayers to ancestors have been remarked by observers among the Konde peoples (just north of Lake Nyassa), and among the Wabena and the Manganja.[64]

Westward, in Northeast Rhodesia, the Wanyamwanga are accustomed to offer to the ancestral spirits the first beer and flour made from the new harvest. With the invitation to the spirits to partake go thanksgiving for the harvest and petitions to avert illness and to maintain peace.[65] One of the two classes of spirits worshipped by the A-Wemba are the *mipashi*, or ancestral spirits. Of these there are two main classes — first, the spirits of departed chiefs, worshipped publicly by all the tribe, and secondly, the domestic spirits worshipped privately by the head of each family, who acts as priest for the other

[59a] O. Baumann, Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle, Berlin, 1894, pp. 187, 193.

[60] O. Baumann, Usambara, Berlin, 1891, pp. 141 f.

[61] O. Dempwolff, Die Sandawe, Hamburg, 1916, pp. 141 f.

[62] Frazer, Golden Bough, Pt. IV, vol. II, pp. 188 f.

[63] K. Weule, Native Life in East Africa (translated), London, 1909, pp. 324 ff.

[64] F. Fülleborn, Das Deutsche Njassa- und Ruwuma-Gebiet, Berlin, 1906, pp. 151, 216, 498; cf. W. P. Johnson, Nyasa, the Great Water, Oxford, 1922, p. 118.

[65] Frazer, Golden Bough, Pt. V, vol. II, p. 112.

members. Sacrifices of a sheep, a goat, or a fowl are made. While the spirit receives the blood poured out on the ground, the members of the family partake of the flesh. This cult of his nearest deceased relatives is regarded as the chief religious duty of every man in the tribe. The ancestral spirits are on the whole beneficent, and their aid is invoked on special occasions, such as harvesting or travelling.[66] The Tumbuka of the Nyassaland Protectorate are wont to conclude the year of mourning for the deceased with a great feast for the friends and relatives and a procession to the grave. There beer is poured out, with the words: "We have come to bring you . . . back to the village. Come and visit your family. See, I give you this . . . that you may drink." [67] Tiny huts are prepared as dwellings for ancestral spirits and offerings are there presented.[68] Other tribes of Nyassaland, including the Angoni and the Yao, believe that the dead have power to help or hinder their surviving relatives, and consequently propitiate them with sacrifices and call to them for help.[69] Duff Macdonald has written a full account of the religion of the tribes of this area. According to his observations, "the spirits of the dead are the gods of the living"; [70] "the spirit of every deceased man and woman, with the solitary exception of wizards and witches, becomes an object of homage." [71] As a matter of practice, however, the community concentrates its attention on the immediate ancestor of the village chief, to whom, indeed, most of the inhabitants are either related or assumed to be so. But the individual is still at liberty to approach with prayer and sacrifice the spirits of his own forefathers.[72] Writing of the natives of Manica and Sofala in southern Mozambique (Portuguese East Africa) R. C. F. Maugham says: "The native's reverence for . . . the efficacy of propitiating the spirits of the dead . . . has a pro-

[66] C. Gouldsbury and H. Sheane, The Great Plateau of Northern Rhodesia, London, 1911, pp. 82 ff.

[67] D. Fraser, Winning a Primitive People, New York, 1914, p. 160.

[68] Frazer, Folk-lore in the Old Testament, vol. III, p. 263.

[69] D. Fraser, op. cit., pp. 126 f.; Frazer, Golden Bough, Pt. V, vol. II, p. 112; J. W. Jack, Daybreak in Livingstonia, New York, 1900, p. 260.

[70] Duff Macdonald, Africana, vol. I, London, 1882, p. 59.

[71] Ibid., vol. I, p. 68.

[72] Ibid., vol. I, pp. 64 f.

found bearing upon his every action. More than anything, perhaps, the people fear the anger . . . of these spirits, and leave nothing undone to conciliate them. . . . Before any important undertaking the spirits are interrogated, and prayed to give some sign to indicate their views with regard to the matter at issue." [73] Among the Ba-Ila of northern Rhodesia the family divinities are the ghosts of father, grandfather, and other near relatives. They continue to take an interest in the welfare of those on earth and are never far away. The man and wife have different family divinities, the children inheriting the father's. The religious attitude, of trust and fear combined, is determined by the belief that the living and the dead depend on one another.[74] The Barotse, along the upper Zambesi, have at least one form of ancestor worship in their sacrifices at the tombs of the royal ancestors. As one of their chiefs put it, after conversion to Christianity, "Let us talk no more about our ancestors; they are no gods." [75] Another tribe of the Upper Zambesi, the A-Maravi, or Zimbas, attribute to the spirits of the dead all the good and ill that befall them, and offer to the deceased each year the first-fruits of all produce.[76] The Matabeles, their chief acting as priest, sacrifice oxen to their ancestral spirits in order to bring rain.[77]

In Southwest Africa (former "German Southwest Africa") two of the leading tribes are the Ovampo and the Herero. Among the former a conspicuous place is assigned to the worship of the spirits of the dead, who are believed to exercise a powerful influence over the living. The soul of an ordinary dead man can affect only the members of his own family,[78] but the spirits of dead chiefs can give or withhold rain. Hence great respect is paid to them and a thanksgiving festival held in their honor at the close of the harvest season.[79] Among the Herero,

[73] R. C. F. Maugham, Portuguese East Africa, London, 1906, pp. 280 f.

[74] E. W. Smith and A. M. Dale, The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia, vol. II, London, 1920, pp. 124, 165–174.

[75] C. W. Mackintosh, Coillard of the Zambesi, London, 1907, pp. 339, 431; F. Coillard, Sur le Haut-Zambèze, Paris, 1898, pp. 190, 196.

[76] Frazer, Golden Bough, Pt. V, vol. II, p. 111.

[77] Ibid., Pt. I, vol. I, p. 352.

[78] Ibid., Pt. IV, vol. II, p. 188.

[79] Ibid., Pt. V, vol. II, p. 110.

too, ancestral spirits are feared and propitiated with offerings.[80] So constant is the dread of their power to inflict misfortune that the chief aim of religion is to appease them. The chief seat of this worship is the family hearth, near which sacred sticks are kept to represent individual ancestors of the paternal clan. Here the newborn child is brought to be introduced to the spirits and receive a name, and here the bride is conducted at marriage, that sacrifices may be made.[81] South of the Herero, in Namaqualand, the veneration of famous ancestors is prominent in the native religion.[82] The Bechuana, too, are ancestor-worshippers. "Their highest . . . act of worship . . . is to sacrifice a sheep at the grave of a deceased ancestor, whose help is invoked by prayer." [83] They ascribe changes of weather to the influence of deceased members of the tribe.[84] The Bankuma in the northeastern part of the Transvaal, make offerings to ancestors with such prayers as these: "O you, our former fathers and mothers, . . . here is the ox you want; eat it, sharing it with our ancestors who died both before and after you. . . . Give us life, give good things to us and our children." [85] The religion of the Baronga, the natives of Delagoa Bay, is chiefly concerned with the spirits of their ancestors. The leading divinities are the ancestors of the reigning chief, who, especially in times of national trouble, are worshipped in the forest cemeteries by appointed priests. But each family has likewise its own ancestors, at whose worship the father of the family officiates. At deaths and at marriages the blessing of these spirits is invoked upon the dead or upon the new arrival in the family.[86] The neighboring Thonga have similar beliefs and practices. The tribal ancestors are held responsible for the fertility of the soil, and first-fruits are sacrificed to them. The family, too, maintain the cult of their own ancestors, at which the eldest member of the family officiates. Not only are

[80] Frazer, Golden Bough, Pt. IV, vol. II, p. 186.
[81] Ibid., Pt. I, vol. II, pp. 221 f.
[82] G. Fritsch, Die Eingeborenen Süd-Afrika's, Breslau, 1872, p. 354.
[83] J. Mackenzie, Day-Dawn in Dark Places, London, 1884, p. 217.
[84] Hartland, Ritual and Belief, p. 175.
[85] L. Lévy-Bruhl, La Mentalité primitive, Paris, 1922, p. 82 and note.
[86] H. A. Junod, Les Baronga, Neuchâtel, 1898, pp. 381 ff.

the ancestors invoked at the time of marriage but also in case of disease, when divination has revealed the fact that some ancestral spirit is the cause.[87] In this tribe there are two sets of ancestors for each family—those on the father's and those on the mother's side.[88]

All the religious interests of the Zulus centre around the *amatongo*, or ancestral spirits. The tribe as a whole may worship the spirits of tribal ancestors or departed chiefs; but it is the deceased father, the most recently departed head of the house, to whom the cult of each family is addressed. The sphere of activity of these spirits could hardly be wider. Sickness is sent by the dead to indicate their want of food; victory in battle is the result of their aid; a successful harvest is due to their help; and they are able not only to speak to their descendants in dreams and omens, but to appear to them in the form of wasps or of serpents. Indeed, "the whole of Zulu life is based on their belief in the vivid interest taken by the . . . spirits of the dead in the affairs of the living." [89] The sacrifice of bullocks, accompanied by prayers, is the commonest form of offering. An indication that such offerings of food are prompted by the needs of the dead as well as by those of the living is afforded by the frequent use in prayer of the argument that if all their worshippers are allowed to die, the dead will have no village to enter and no food to eat but grasshoppers. The dead are supposed not only to suffer from human wants, but also to maintain their human characteristics. A kind father, for instance, will remain kind, and in his gentleness his descendants may continue to trust.[90]

Each family among the Basuto is supposed to be under the direct influence and protection of its ancestors; but the tribe as a whole worships the ancestors of the reigning chief. The spirits of the deceased interfere in the daily affairs of the living

[87] H. A. Junod, 'Bantu Heathen Prayers,' in International Review of Missions, vol. XI, no. 44, pp. 561–565; cf. H. A. Junod, The Life of a South African Tribe, vol. II, Neuchâtel, 1913, pp. 293, 344, 348 ff., 386.

[88] Frazer, Golden Bough, Pt. IV, vol. II, p. 181.

[89] J. A. Farrer, Zululand and the Zulus, London, 1879, p. 134.

[90] Ibid., pp. 127–136; J. Shooter, The Kafirs of Natal and the Zulu Country, London, 1857, pp. 161 ff.; L. Grout, Zulu-Land, Philadelphia, 1864, pp. 137, 144.

and influence their destiny, and are therefore approached with prayer and sacrifice. Since every disease is attributed to them, divination by means of bones is employed to indicate whether it is the paternal or the maternal ancestors who are offended, and steps are then taken to present the necessary offerings.[91] In each family of the Hottentots the ancestors are considered almost as household gods. Prayers are made to them and gifts offered. But in order to be heard it is necessary for the worshippers to perform the ceremonies at the grave itself. One woman of the tribe is reported as saying, "If we are in trouble, we always go and pray at the graves of our grandparents and ancestors." [92]

The native tribes inhabiting the area now known as the Union of South Africa are frequently referred to in general as the Kafirs. Meaning merely 'infidel,' this name is not ethnologically correct, but it is commonly used to cover such tribes as the Zulus, Basutos, and other natives of southernmost Africa. Writing of "the essential Kafir," Kidd says: "We find the natives associating the spirits of their ancestors with some special animal, most commonly with a snake. . . . The ancestors do not live in the actual individual snakes, but in the genus. . . . When men are alive they love to be praised and flattered, fed and attended to; after death they want the very same things, for death does not change personality. Thus, after any calamity, or after the appearance of a snake in the kraal, or a vivid dream of some dead relation, the men will select an ox to coax the spirit into a good temper. . . . In time of drought, or sickness, or great trouble, there would be great searchings of heart as to which ancestor had been neglected. . . . The most important part of the whole matter seems to be the praising of the ancestral spirit. It is as important as the sacrifice." [93] "These spirits may be offended and made angry by neglect or otherwise . . . and may inflict punishment which the people dread, and seek to avert." [94] An

[91] E. Casalis, Les Bassoutos, Paris, 1859, pp. 257–264; J. Widdicombe, Fourteen Years in Basutoland, London, 1891, p. 60.

[92] A. de Quatrefages, The Pygmies (translated), New York, 1895, pp. 228 f.

[93] D. Kidd, The Essential Kafir, London, 1904, pp. 84–92.

[94] W. C. Holden, The Past and Future of the Kaffir Races, London, 1866, p. 298.

interesting piece of early testimony to the religion of this same group of tribes is offered in a work by two French missionaries, who preface their remarks with the quaint statement that "all the blacks whom we have known are atheists; it would nevertheless be not impossible to find among them some deists." Not quite content, however, with this sophisticated classification, they proceed to explain the local cult of ancestors, stating that these divinities correspond to the *manes* of the ancient pagans.[95]

Bantu is the name applied to the family of languages spoken by nearly all the peoples inhabiting the territory south of a certain irregular boundary, drawn between Cameroon and Zanzibar. Since the name is also applied to the peoples themselves, it covers a large number of the tribes to which we have referred above. One or two quotations concerning the Bantu in general will therefore serve to reinforce and to summarize the facts already presented. The religion of the whole Bantu family, says Frazer, appears to be mainly ancestor worship.[96] And, says Theal, "the religion of the Bantu was based upon the supposition of the existence of spirits that could interfere with the affairs of this world. These spirits were those of their ancestors and their deceased chiefs." [97] As Sir Harry Johnston puts it, "the essence of true Negro religion is ancestor worship." [98]

The tribes of Madagascar have long been noted as specially devoted to different forms of ancestor worship, all of which find analogies on the continent of Africa. The earliest evidence may be found in a number of interesting letters from Catholic missionaries written in the 17th century. Le Père Luis Mariano writes in 1616 : The Malagasy "offer . . . sacrifices to the *manes* of their dead . . . to whom they render a cult like that

[95] T. Arbousset and F. Dumas, Relation d'un voyage d'exploration, etc., Paris, 1842, pp. 77, 469.

[96] Frazer, Golden Bough, Pt. IV, vol. II, p. 176.

[97] G. McC. Theal, The Yellow and Dark-skinned People of Africa South of the Zambesi, London, 1910, p. 183.

[98] H. H. Johnston, Liberia, vol. II, London, 1906, p. 1062; cf. Lévy-Bruhl, op. cit., p. 81 and note; E. W. Smith, The Religion of Lower Races, New York, 1923, pp. 33–48.

which we accord to our saints." Again he says: "They imagine that they are at the mercy of the *manes* of their relatives, to whom they attribute all the good and evil which God sends them." And le Père d'Azevedo writes in 1617: The Malagasy "address their prayers and make their offerings to the souls of their dead relatives, who are their idols. . . . They invoke these dead in every circumstance, especially in difficult moments." [99] Fuller and more recent testimony is also available. From it we learn that the controlling religious belief of the Malagasy is in the power of departed spirits to control affairs in this world, and that therefore his first duty is to be on good terms with his deceased kinsfolk. Any calamity is a sure sign of the displeasure of these spirits, and much money is spent, in case of illness or other trouble, in sacrificing oxen at the tombs of the ancestors.[100] Private ceremonies, in which only the members of the family take part, are held in the corner of the house where the deceased was wont to sit. The prayers in use on such occasions may be summed up as follows: "Here I am, my ancestor; I come with my family to bring you a part of what is yours. Be favorable now, and grant to us what we ask." [101] Of more central importance, however, than this limited domestic cult is the royal ancestor worship, especially of the Sakalava and the Hova. The spirits of celebrated deceased chieftains are worshipped at their tombs as the gods of the community. These graves are sacred places confided to the care of especially appointed guardians, and there are performed extensive ceremonies — including a grand annual festival — to glorify the ancestors and to obtain from them blessings and rewards.[102]

[99] Collection des ouvrages anciens concernant Madagascar, vol. II, Paris, 1904, pp. 228, 233, 245.

[100] H. W. Little, Madagascar, its History and People, Edinburgh, 1884, pp. 83 ff.

[101] M. A. Leblond, La Grande Ile de Madagascar, Paris, 1907, pp. 227 f.

[102] H. Rusillon, Un Culte dynastique avec évocation des morts, Paris, 1912, pp. 43–60; J. Sibree, Jr., The Great African Island, London, 1880, pp. 226 f., 303.

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